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REMARKS OF MARIA PEREIRA  
IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED BILL NO. 5724  
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC HEARING  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2013  
10.00 AM IN ROOM 2B OF THE LOB

CHAIRMAN ROJAS, CHAIRMAN CASANO,  
AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE.

MY NAME IS MARIA PEREIRA.

I AM AN ELECTED MEMBER OF THE BRIDGEPORT BOARD OF EDUCATION AND I AM HERE TODAY TO SPEAK IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSED BILL NO. 5274, AN ACT PROHIBITING MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES FROM SERVING ON CERTAIN LEGISLATIVE BODIES.

I WAS ELECTED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION IN A VERY UNCONVENTIONAL FASHION. I WAS ENDORSED IN 2009 ONLY BY THE WORKING FAMILIES PARTY. ALONG WITH ANOTHER WORKING FAMILIES CANDIDATE, WE WON TWO SEATS ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION. DURING THE RECENT SPECIAL ELECTION ORDERED BY THE SUPREME COURT FOLLOWING THE ILLEGAL OUSTING OF OUR ELECTED BOARD BY THE POLITICAL MACHINE, A THIRD CANDIDATE RUNNING ON THE WORKING FAMILIES PARTY LINE WAS ELECTED.

IN 2009, BEFORE I HAD EVER THOUGHT OF RUNNING FOR OFFICE, I ATTENDED AND ADDRESSED A BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING. THE REASON FOR MY ATTENDANCE WAS TO INQUIRE ABOUT THE FACT THAT MY DAUGHTER, A STUDENT IN ONE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, HAD 9 MATH TEACHERS IN LESS THAN ONE YEAR. I WENT TO THE MEETING TO BRING THAT FACT TO THE ATTENTION OF THE BOARD AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION WITH THE HOPE OF GETTING SOME ANSWERS.

I GOT VERY FEW ANSWERS, BUT MY FORAY INTO GOVERNMENT DID LEAD ME TO SEEK ELECTION TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AS A CANDIDATE ON THE WORKING FAMILIES LINE.

AFTER I WAS ELECTED AND LEARNED MORE ABOUT OUR MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT, I WAS SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT OUR CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS ARE PRESIDED OVER BY THE MAYOR OF THE CITY. I WAS EVEN MORE SURPRISED TO LEARN THAT THE CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT WAS A CITY EMPLOYEE WHO WORKS FOR THE MAYOR IN THE LABOR RELATIONS DEPARTMENT. HE IS ALSO A DISTRICT LEADER ON THE DEMOCRATIC TOWN COMMITTEE.

I QUICKLY LEARNED THAT AT LEAST FIVE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL, WHICH CONSISTS OF TWENTY (20) MEMBERS, ARE CITY EMPLOYEES. AND LIKE OUR CITY COUNCIL PRESIDENT, THEY ARE ALSO MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRATIC TOWN COMMITTEE.

I WAS ESPECIALLY SURPRISED BECAUSE AS MANY OF YOU MAY ALREADY KNOW, THERE IS A STATE STATUTE WHICH PROHIBITS AND BOARD OF EDUCATION EMPLOYEE FROM SERVING AS A BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER. IF THE STATE STATUTE PROHIBITS THIS DUE TO THE CONFLICT THAT IS CLEARLY EVIDENT, HOW CAN THERE THEN BE A STATE STATUTE THAT ALLOWS MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES TO SERVE ON A CITY COUNCIL?

WHEN I ASKED WHY THIS BLATANT CONFLICT OF INTERESTS WAS PERMITTED, I WAS TOLD THAT OUR CITY CHARTER PROHIBITED CITY EMPLOYEES FROM SERVING ON THE CITY COUNCIL. HOWEVER, THAT CITY CHARTER PROVISION WAS OVERRIDDEN BY STATE LAW.

WE IN BRIDGEPORT DO NOT HAVE THE POWER TO CHANGE A STATE LAW, BUT YOU DO.

IF THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT HAD A BOARD OF FINANCE, THERE WOULD BE NO NEED FOR ME TO BE HERE TESTIFYING ON THIS BILL. HOWEVER, THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF FINANCE OF OUR CITY IS GIVEN TO THE CITY COUNCIL.

SOME HAVE COMMENTED THAT THIS BILL IS ANTI-UNION. NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. I SUPPORT REPRESENTATIVE HENNESSY'S PROPOSED BILL AND AS ONE WHO HAS BEEN ELECTED AS A THIRD PARTY CANDIDATE, I AM HERE TO TELL YOU THAT THIS BILL IS NOT ANTI-UNION. IN FACT, IT IS A PRO-DEMOCRACY BILL WHICH WILL HELP TO INSURE THAT THE PEOPLE OF BRIDGEPORT CAN BETTER CHALLENGE AN OPPRESSIVE POLITICAL MACHINE.

IT IS A BLATANT CONFLICT OF INTEREST FOR MEMBERS OF OUR CITY COUNCIL TO BE CITY EMPLOYEES. THE BRIDGEPORT CITY COUNCIL IS THE CITY'S BUDGET AUTHORITY, MAKES APPROPRIATIONS OF MONIES IN THE ANNUAL BUDGET AND SETS THE MILL RATE. WHEN A FULL THIRTY PERCENT (30%) ARE CITY EMPLOYEES, AN UNHEALTHY CONFLICT OF INTEREST IS INEVITABLE.

DURING MY TIME ON THE BOARD OF EDUCATION, I HAVE SEEN AND EXPERIENCED THE EFFECTS OF MACHINE POLITICS IN THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT. THIS BILL WILL STRIKE A BLOW IN FAVOR OF DEMOCRACY AND WILL HELP TO OPEN THE CLOSED CORPORATION WHICH BRIDGEPORT'S CITY GOVERNMENT HAS BECOME.

THANK YOU AND I WILL BE HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS.